

# A Brief History of the Huntersville Presbyterian Church

By Julia Ann Lockridge

Huntersville Presbyterian Church, which has served as a barracks, hospital, court room, and place of worship for all denominations, is located in Pocahontas County.

Huntersville was the name given to the sedate, scenic, and historic village in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains as a compliment to the hunters that swarmed there during the seasons. Two historic buildings are now standing in Huntersville: the brick jail, which was built in 1823 immediately after Huntersville became the county seat of Pocahontas County by an Act of the Virginia Assembly in 1822, and the Huntersville Presbyterian Church, which was completed in 1854. Both of these withstood the fire set by the Federal troops during the Civil War to prevent Huntersville from becoming a Confederate depot for military supplies.

Huntersville, known as "The little place with large ways,"<sup>1</sup> had every year a military celebration called the "Big Muster"<sup>2</sup> which was much looked forward to by the people of the vicinity. The credit of having the "Big Muster" was due to Major John Alexander of Lexington, who trained the 127th Regiment for this celebration.

To Huntersville is due the distinction of being the first place to hold Sunday School throughout the year in Pocahontas County. This was achieved by the Rev. Harris, a native of Pennsylvania. This young minister had such great brilliance that his first call to preach was in New Orleans.<sup>3</sup> But due to nervous conditions and broken health, he had to come to the mountains for hope of regaining his health. He remained in Huntersville for three years; then in 1841 he went to Hampshire County where he married a lady of wealth and spent the remainder of his life in a dry, isolated, mountain home.

<sup>1</sup>William T. Price, *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County* (Marlinton, W. Va.: Price Book, 1901), p. 187.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 186.  
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

Religious services were held in the courthouse for many years; then the academy was built in 1842, and it was used mostly by the Methodists for a place to worship. The Presbyterian Church was constructed in 1854, and there all denominations worshipped.

Huntersville Presbyterian Church was the eighteenth Presbyterian Church to be constructed in the Greenbrier Presbytery and one of three others to be constructed in this Presbytery during 1854. The other two were Centerville Presbyterian Church in Greenville, Monroe County, and Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church in Sinks Grove, Monroe County.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. George E. Craig donated the land where the Huntersville Presbyterian Church was built. He was a prominent businessman of Huntersville. It was on this land his home stood in 1852, when it was consumed by fire along with the two hotels and a store. It was about this fire that Frederick Burr, who had served under Napoleon Bonaparte in the battle of Waterloo, said as he entered Huntersville and saw the smoke ascending from the ruins, "It looks like a coat with nothing left but the tails."<sup>5</sup>

Since the church was constructed in 1854<sup>6</sup> it is in the colonial style with a balcony for slaves. Behind the church is a wood house which has a door opening into the church on the right-hand side of the pulpit. This wood house is still used. Tradition says the women of Huntersville had a fair where pies, cakes, cookies, breads, and other edibles were sold to raise money for the bell which cost seventy-five dollars. It was bought around 1855 and is still used. The first trustees of this church were W. J. McLaughlin, W. T. Gammon, W. Sheen, Ben Herold, and W. J. Fertig.

The Civil War came soon after this colonial structure, in which the people of Huntersville took so much pride, was completed. During the war it was used as a garrison and hospital for Federal and Confederate troops. Federal troops burned part of Huntersville to prevent it from being a Confederate depot for military supplies, but the church was not burned. Robert

<sup>4</sup>"Inventory of Presbyterian Churches in West Virginia," West Virginia Historical Records Survey, 1941, pp. 121-22.

<sup>5</sup>Price, *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County*, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup>"Inventory of Presbyterian Churches in West Virginia," West Virginia Historical Records Survey, pp. 121-122.

E. Lee was encamped within a stone's throw of the church while it was being used as a hospital. Names of soldiers could be seen upon the walls and beams of the church until a few years ago when it was redecorated. The town was never captured but often occupied by both sides at different times. During this period the Church Bible was stolen. It was commonly thought that it was misplaced by Mason Greene of Virginia. Many years later the Bible was found in a tenement house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup> It had come into the possession of Mr. Andrew Mellon in Pittsburgh, who after finding its owners sent the Bible to a bindery to be rebound, with the expectation of returning it to the Huntersville Presbyterian Church. Before he accomplished this mission he became ill and died. Mr. Mellon's family did not know where the Bible was sent to be rebound. Thus, not knowing of anyone who knew of the Bible's whereabouts, to this day this church is without its original Bible.

The November 1863 term of County Court was held in this church; it was decided at this meeting to appropriate the sum of \$2,000 for the support of destitute families of soldiers of the Confederacy.

The Reverends M. D. Dunlap and W. T. Price held the first sacramental services in Huntersville after the Civil War, in the Huntersville Presbyterian Church in the early summer of 1865. A detachment of federal troops rode through during the services, but the services were not interrupted. The soldiers looked through the broken windows and carefully examined the horses. The Rev. Dunlap went out after the services to find his horse had been taken as a "branded horse."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the first minister of Huntersville Presbyterian Church, the Rev. M. D. Dunlap, returned to his home in Hillsboro on a borrowed horse. The stolen horse had been acquired by the Rev. Dunlap during Averill's retreat through the vicinity of Hillsboro. It was a worn-out horse and had been left to die.

Huntersville Presbyterian Church throughout its history has been connected with one or more churches in the vicinity of Knapps Creek Valley, sharing a minister with them. Prom-

<sup>7</sup>Helen Barlow gave me this information; it was given to her by the late Andrew Price who was greatly interested in the return of the Bible.  
<sup>8</sup>Price, *Historical Sketches of Pocahontas County*, p. 387.

inent persons from this church were the Rev. J. Newton Craig, who was Executive Secretary of Home Missions of this assembly, and the Rev. William T. Price, D.D., who was a prominent minister and historian of Greenbrier Presbytery eighty years ago. Some early ministers of Huntersville Presbyterian Church and surrounding Presbyterian Churches were J. S. Blair, David Cunningham, Joseph Brown, T. P. W. Margruder, J. C. Barr, R. P. Kennedy, G. L. Brown, H. H. Hamilton, J. H. McCrown, and W. T. Price, D.D.<sup>9</sup>

The Masonic Lodge was organized in Huntersville on August 11, 1875. This was the date of the first meeting, which was held on the second floor of the courthouse. Their charter was granted on November 11, 1875. In need of a Lodge Hall arrangements were made with the trusteeship of the Presbyterian Church to add a second story to the church building for the use of a Lodge Hall. This Lodge was the first lodge in Pocahontas County and is the Mother Lodge of three others in this county. The other three are located in Marlinton, Cass, and Hillsboro. For years it was the smallest lodge in the state.

When the roof and steeple of the church were removed to add the second story it was found that the large pine ball on the spire had several bullet holes in it. In the lodge room there is a gavel made from part of this ball<sup>10</sup> by Mr. O. E. McKeever who was once Master of the Lodge and also a worker on the Lodge Hall's construction.

The white wood structure was at this time enlarged and renovated in a very attractive style. Leading to the second floor is a winding stairway on a landing of which is the entrance to the balcony; then the stairway continues to the second floor.

The lodge hall was dedicated on June 18, 1896.<sup>11</sup> The furniture of the lodge is all hand made, all the working tools are hand made from black walnut and are still in use today. The Masons rent the hall to the Order of the Eastern Star.

The church interior was redecorated about the time of its hundredth anniversary which was August 12, 1954.<sup>12</sup> At the

<sup>9</sup>Lloyd McCourtney, *Churches on the Western Waters* (1948).

<sup>10</sup>Warren Fowler Mallory, *Moon Lodges* (1954).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>"Inventory of Presbyterian Churches in West Virginia," *West Virginia Historical Records Survey*, pp. 121-122.



time of this writing it is one hundred and three years old. The interior walls of the first floor were painted green and the pews were re-done. However, one can still see two fox and geese boards which were carved there by the soldiers. The original organ is still there but it is not used. The outdoor toilet that was built when the church was built is still standing.

Few people attend the church today; it has twelve active members and two deacons, Mr. Fred Moore and Mr. Clarence McComb. The organist is Mrs. Dotty Davidson. At the present time Huntersville Presbyterian Church is connected with Poage Lane, Buckeye, and Westminster Presbyterian Churches. The minister is Mr. James D. Singletary, Jr. Some thought has been given, since the attendance of Huntersville Presbyterian Church is so small, that they will join with Westminster Church which is located about seven miles north of Huntersville. Westminster has a larger membership and is more active than Huntersville.

Huntersville Presbyterian Church is well cared for and the lot around the church was enclosed by pines last fall by the Huntersville Men's Club.